

WEDNESDAY June 02, 2004

Program to alert Utahns on status of power grid

By Steven Oberbeck
The Salt Lake Tribune

For the fourth consecutive year, the Utah Energy Office and the state's electrical utilities are teaming up to issue daily advisories on the status of the power grid Utahns rely on to run their air conditioners, refrigerators and TV sets.

The PowerForward program will run through Sept. 15. It will advise Utahns of the days when they need to be particularly mindful of conserving electricity, said Lisa Yoder, Utah Energy Office program manager.

On days when electricity usage is particularly high due to soaring temperatures, the Utah Energy Office will issue either a "yellow" or a "red" alert that asks Utahns to conserve power and help prevent brownouts. On days when Utahns need not worry about their electricity consumption, the state will issue a "green" alert.

Yoder pointed out that last year -- the hottest summer on record -- there were only five yellow alert days. "We have yet to issue a red alert during the four years of the PowerForward program."

PacifiCorp spokeswoman Margaret Kessler said the program's goal is to help lower the demand for power during the peak hours between 1 p.m. and 8 p.m..

When a yellow alert is issued, consumers can help by using barbecues and grills instead of electric ranges. They can set the thermostats in their homes higher and hold off running their dishwashers and washing machines until late in the evening, Kessler said.

"It is a good program," said Ted Rampton, vice president of government affairs for the 45-member Utah Associated Municipal Power System, or UAMPS.

"Most of the time, Utahns will not have to take any steps beyond their normal conservation efforts. But there are some days when it's beneficial for the public to act in a collective way to ease the burden on the system."

Utahns can sign up for a daily PowerForward e-mail alert from the Utah Energy Office at www.powerforward.utah.gov. In addition, the alerts are part of the daily radio and television weather broadcasts.

steve@sltrib.com